

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMCONSUL OPORTO POUCH
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
USMISSION USNATO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
COMUSFORAZ

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BRUSSELS ALSO FOR USMISSION EC

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB PO
SUBJECT: COMMUNISTS MAKE MAY DAY THEIR OWN

REF: LISBON 3208 (NOTAL) (DTG 281704Z APR 78)

SUMMARY: THE COMMUNIST-DOMINATED GENERAL WORKERS CONFEDERATION
(CGTP) STAGED THE MOST SUCCESSFUL MAY DAY CELEBRATION SINCE 1974.

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COMMUNIST ESTIMATES OF CROWDS BETWEEN 250 AND 500 THOUSAND IN
LISBON ARE EXAGGERATED, BUT THE TURNOUT WAS IMPRESSIVE. TWENTY-ONE
FOREIGN DELEGATIONS WERE PRESENT INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES FROM
THE SOVIET UNION, CUBA, AND PUERTO RICO. THE SKILLFUL
EXPLOITATION OF MAY DAY IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF HOW THE
COMMUNISTS ARE WORKING TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR HOLD ON
ORGANIZED LABOR. WHILE THE CGTP CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE

TO ENGAGE IN MUSCLE-FLEXING AT THE EXPENSE OF THE GOVERNMENT, CGTP CONTROL OF THE WORKERS IS STILL INSUFFICIENT TO MOUNT A SUCCESSFUL GENERAL STRIKE ACTION. END SUMMARY.

1. MONSTER RALLY IN LISBON: WARNINGS BY NON-COMMUNIST LABOR LEADERS THAT THE CGTP WAS SEEKING TO TURN MAY DAY INTO A COMMUNIST DAY WERE WELL FOUNDED. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF ENTHUSIASTIC WORKERS UNDER CGTP BANNERS MARCHED IN A LISBON PARADE THAT LASTED MORE THAN FIVE HOURS BEFORE ASSEMBLING IN THE FIRST OF MAY STADIUM, WHICH WAS FILLED TO OVERFLOW CAPACITY. THIS SCENE WAS REPEATED ON A SMALLER SCALE AT CGTP-SPONSORED RALLIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY. DESPITE THE HUGE TURNOUTS, THE CROWDS WERE GENERALLY PEACEFUL AND A FESTIVE AIR PREVAILED.

2. UNITY THEME: WHILE BILLED BY THE CGTP AS A DAY OF STRUGGLE AND NATIONAL PROTEST AGAINST ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND THE AUSTERITY POLICIES OF THE PS/CDS GOVERNMENT, SPEAKERS AT MOST RALLIES EMPHASIZED THE NEED FOR TRADE UNION UNITY AND DERIDED EFFORTS BY "REFORMISTS" AND "CAPITALIST AGENTS" TO DIVIDE PORTUGUESE WORKERS. THEY HAILED MASSIVE WORKER PARTICIPATION IN THE MAY DAY RALLIES AS AN EXPRESSION OF WORKER SUPPORT FOR THE CGTP. THE PCP ITSELF REMAINED IN THE BACKGROUND LEAVING THE ORCHESTRATION OF ACTIVITIES TO CGTP LEADERSHIP.

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3. DEMOCRATIC RALLIES PALE IN COMPARISON: PS-SPONSORED COMMEMORATIVE ACTIVITIES IN LISBON, WHICH DREW MARIO SOARES AND OTHER PARTY DIGNITARIES, WERE GENERALLY WELL ATTENDED. BUT THESE AND SEPARATE EVENTS ORGANIZED BY THE FAR LEFT WERE MINISCULE IN COMPARISON WITH THE CGTP EXTRAVANGAZAS. THE PSD OLIVEIRA MARTINS FOUNDATION AND THE RECENTLY ORGANIZED DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERATION OF WORKERS (CDT) OF PELAGIO MADUREIRA HAD PREVIOUSLY ANNOUNCED THAT THEY WOULD NOT SPONSOR MAY DAY ACTIVITIES IN PROTEST OF COMMUNIST EFFORTS TO MAKE IT "A COMMUNIST DAY." IN A CDT MAY DAY MANIFESTO, MADUREIRA ATTACKED THE COMMUNISTS FOR "NATIONALIZING MAY DAY FOR THE PCP" AND FOR NEGLECTING TO INFORM THE WORKERS THAT "MAY DAY WAS BORN IN THE UNITED STATES, NOT IN THE SOVIET UNION." TORRES COUTOU OF THE SOUTHERN INSURANCE WORKERS UNION TOLD A PS RALLY IN LISBON THAT MAY DAY SHOULD ALSO COMMEMORATE THE STRUGGLES OF WORKERS IN RUSSIA AND CHILE "THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENT REPRESSION BY THEIR RESPECTIVE REGIMES."

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4. INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION: THE COMMUNIST PRESS
GAVE CONSIDERABLE COVERAGE TO THE PRESENCE OF INTERNATIONAL
VISITORS MANY OF WHOM HAD ATTENDED THE RECENT WFTU
CONGRESS IN PRAGUE. THE SOVIET UNION, NEARLY ALL EAST
EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AS WELL AS THE FRENCH CGT AND ITALIAN
CGIL SENT FRATERNAL DELEGATES AS DID THE USO AND WORKER
COMMISSIONS OF SPAIN. THE WFTU SECRETARIAT, THE CHILEAN
CUT-IN-EXILE, CUBAN CGT, AND TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS IN
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THE FORMER PORTUGUESE AFRICAN COLONIES WERE ALSO REPRESENTED.
PEDRO GRANT OF THE UNITED WORKERS MOVEMENT OF PUERTO RICO
REPRESENTED THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE OF LATIN AMERICAN TRADE

UNION UNITY AND GAVE A PRESS INTERVIEW CONDEMNING US IMPERIALISM AND PRAISING THE CUBAN REVOLUTION. FRATERNAL GREETINGS WERE SENT BY THE CMT, ETUC, THE BRITISH TUC, AND FRENCH CFDT.

5. COMMENT: THE COMMUNISTS HAVE PULLED OFF A MAJOR PROGAGANDA COUP FOR THE CGTP WHOSE STOCK IS NOW PERHAPS AS HIGH WITH THE WORKERS OF PORTUGAL AS AT ANYTIME SINCE THE IMMEDIATE POST-REVOLUTION PERIOD. WHILE CGTP SPOKESMEN STRESSED TRADE UNION UNITY, THEIR RHETORIC WAS ALSO DIRECTED AGAINST THE GOP, THE IMF, AND AUSTERITY. THEY SUCCESSFULLY EXPLOITED THE ISSUES WITH WHICH WORKERS ARE MOST CONCERNED TO TURN MAY DAY INTO A WELL-ORCHESTRATED DISPLAY OF WORKER SUPPORT FOR THE CGTP. THE DEMOCRATIC RESPONSE WAS FORLORN AND INEFFECTIVE, DEMOCRATIC ORATORY FAILED TO REACH VERY MANY WORKERS. EVEN IF THE SERIOUSLY DIVIDED DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNION FORCES SHOULD COME TOGETHER, AN UNLIKELY PROSPECT FOR THE PRESENT, COMMUNIST HEGEMONY IN ORGANIZED LABOR SEEMS ASSURED FOR QUITE SOME TIME.

6. NEVERTHELESS, THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF PORTUGUESE WORKERS ARE NOT COMMUNISTS AND WHILE THEY SEE CERTAIN ADVANTAGES IN CGTP AFFILIATION AND MILITANCY, IT IS STILL UNLIKELY THAT THEY WOULD ADHERE TO CGTP-INITIATED STRIKE ACTION ON A NATIONAL LEVEL OR FOR ANY SUSTAINED PERIOD. JOB SECURITY REMAINS AN OBSTACLE TO A SUCCESSFUL GENERAL STRIKE. BUT THE COMMUNISTS WILL HARDLY REST ON THE LAURELS OF ONE GOOD DAY'S WORK. THEY HAVE PATIENCE, TIME, AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ON THEIR SIDE, NOT TO MENTION A DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION IN A STATE OF DISARRAY, AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE TO ENGAGE IN PERIODIC MUSCLE-FLEXING AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE WHILE WORKING TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR HOLD ON THE UNIONS.
BLOOMFIELD

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